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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3075
INFO RHMMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC//OSD/ISA/AP// IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 004000

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP AND EAP/MTS
USPACOM ALSO FOR FPA HUSO
SECDEF/OSD/ISA/AP (LAWLESS/TOOLAN/BAILEY)
JOINT STAFF/J5 (WILKES/ROBINSON/CLEMONS)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2016

TAGS: PREL PINS MARR MOPS TH RP

SUBJECT: MARTIAL LAW IN THAILAND REVERBERATES IN THE
PHILIPPINES

REF: MANILA 3959

Classified By: (U) Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney
for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) The declaration of martial law in Thailand has captured public attention in the Philippines, dominating the radio and television and making headlines in all the major dailies. It was the topic of the evening at a reception hosted by the Ambassador last night, with journalists and government officials all curious as to how the U.S. would react. Some commentators are drawing parallels between events in Thailand and the 34th anniversary of the declaration of martial law by former President Marcos.

¶2. (SBU) Both Malacanang and Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) Chief of Staff General Esperon have gone out of their way to rule out the possibility of any "Thai-style" coup against President Arroyo. Executive Secretary Ermita told reporters that President Arroyo is in firm control and that the Philippine military supports the constitution and the chain of command. In a statement to the press, General Esperon said, "The AFP remains loyal to the duly constituted authorities. We are taking orders from our commander in chief." He claimed the chain of command was intact, and in subsequent comments at a congressional budget hearing dismissed prospects of a military revolt, saying, "Personally, I know all the service commanders and I can tell you that a matter of a coup d'etat cannot be entertained in the AFP." He stated that the Philippine military was on the road to reform and that it would follow its mandate. Separately, Philippine Army Commander Lieutenant General Tolentino said the Philippine Army would "never allow a similar incident to happen (in the Philippines)."

¶3. (SBU) Despite these pronouncements, memories of the aborted February 2006 mutiny by elite Scout Ranger and Marine troops remain fresh. The alleged coup plotters, including prominent officers, remain in confinement awaiting courts martial. While the Philippine military has successfully put down a variety of coup attempts over the years, many local observers believe that the Philippines' vibrant, but still young and struggling, democracy remains vulnerable.

¶4. (C) In her public and private statements, the Ambassador, as well as other members of the Country Team, have stressed, and will continue to stress, U.S. support for democracy, the rule of law, constitutional processes, and the chain of command. Other signs of U.S. support for Philippine

democracy and U.S. engagement with a military under civilian control could be helpful during this sensitive period. A U.S. Navy ship visit to Manila, perhaps in the context of the upcoming Talon-Vision Exercise, in a classic naval presence mission would help accomplish this mission.

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KENNEY